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BRYANT CELEBRATION.



THE  
BRYANT CELEBRATION

BY  
THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB.

NOVEMBER 3, 1874.

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COMMITTEE OF ARRANGEMENTS

FOR BRYANT CELEBRATION BY THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB.

ROBERT COLLYER, *President*.

HORATIO N. POWERS, *Corresponding Secretary*.

WILLIAM MATHEWS.

EDWARD O. BROWN.

JOHN WILKINSON.

COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATION.

EDWARD G. MASON, *Recording Secretary*.

LEANDER T. CHAMBERLAIN.

FRANK F. BROWNE.





## THE BRYANT CELEBRATION.

THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB, numbering among its members many ardent admirers of WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT, desired to add its testimony of respect and esteem to those which were to greet the completion of the poet's eightieth year. It was accordingly unanimously resolved, at a full meeting of its members held October 19th, 1874, that the Club celebrate the occasion by a dinner and appropriate literary exercises. The evening of the birthday, November 3d, 1874, was chosen for the celebration. The Chairman of the Committee of Arrangements was requested to send invitations to be present to Mr. BRYANT, and to his brothers, Messrs. ARTHUR and JOHN H. BRYANT, residing at Princeton, Illinois. Other friends and admirers of the poet were also invited to attend.

At the time appointed, the guests of the Club, with its officers and members, assembled at the Club rooms in the Sherman House, and at nine o'clock moved in procession to the dining-room. The President of the Club, the Rev. ROBERT COLLYER, presided at the table. Mr. ARTHUR BRYANT was at his right, and at his left Mr.

JOHN H. BRYANT. Upon the programme for the evening was inscribed the following acrostic by THOMAS S. CHARD :

BRYANT, thy honored name dwells in a living fam**E**  
 Rounded in deathless beauty; well may these and **I**  
 Yield thee the modest tribute of our praise and son**G**  
 America can claim no name more proudly high**H**  
 Nor one more loved than thine, which holds to-nigh**T**  
 The fame of fourscore years lived worthil**Y**

At the close of the dinner, the President thus addressed the audience :

*Gentlemen :* We meet to-night to celebrate the eightieth birthday of one of the most eminent men in America in genius and character, who is also one of the most delicate-minded and modest men in the world—a man to whom adulation would be something of an affront. And so as we understand this, we shall not fail in our little festival of praise to touch him with a reserve as fine, and a spirit as true, as we should feel if he were sitting among us and listening to every word we shall say.

Neither shall we deceive ourselves about the nature of our gathering so far as to imagine that as a club which would fain do something toward the cultivation of letters in our city and the Northwest, we can add a new lustre to the light in which WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT dwells as in a tabernacle. My paper said this morning that the star which we see now in the daytime near the sun will pass by-and-bye across his disc as a dark spot. Apart and alone, she borrows something of his glory; but, blended close with his light, she loses what seemed to be her own. This must be our place, and the place of all such gatherings as this to-night, and wherever in the future men of our quality come together for such a purpose. A man of genius holds in himself a light which men who look up to him can only borrow; and so when on these rare occasions—such as the centenary of Burns in '59, of Scott in '71, of Priestley in this year, and now, when our great fellow-citizen has come to fourscore years—the

force of a spiritual gravitation draws us within the very circle of their light and fire, any shining of ours can be but as darkness for the moment against the heart of their native glory.

But all the same, this is a good thing to do, when we are drawn to it, as we must be to-night, by that genuine admiration of a great poet which, as Coleridge says, is a continuous undercurrent of feeling everywhere present but only now and then culminating as a separate excitement. We have all felt this undercurrent in connection with our friend and teacher, as we stood at our work, or sat in our homes, or went about the world and blessed the giver with warm hearts for his gift. It is but natural, therefore, at such a time as this, when our thought of him rises and swells into a tender emotion, while we watch him waiting for the angel who will presently whisper, "Friend, come up higher," that we should try to gather some gleam of the honor we cannot give in meeting as we do to-night, and paying a tribute of reverence, of loyalty, and of love to one who has brought a new glory to the American name, and done so much to create a new order of nobility in the world. Talking with a friend of mine in New York about an ovation they gave him there a few years ago, Mr. BRYANT said: "I think a good deal of this honor you are pleased to heap upon me is to be credited to my great age. When a man keeps on living as long as I have managed to live, any little service he may have rendered to his time becomes very much magnified, and the years become a pedestal on which he stands and receives honors which do not belong really to his more intimate and essential qualities." And, as a general rule, I suppose there is a grain of truth in the remark. It was to be expected, also, that of all the men we have among us he should have said this, because it is in exact harmony with the modesty I have mentioned as one of the cardinal qualities of his nature. Yet it is not so true of him as it would be of many others, because the things for which we honor and love him stand in a great degree apart from the question as to whether he is fourscore or forty years old. They seize primal things and principles; they are not of the fashion of this world, which passes away; they touch the unseen and eternal. And so, while we do honor the white head, it is not that, I think, we reverence most; it is the noble, manful life which he has welded all these years into a pure and beautiful genius, blending both together so that you are not able to tell where the welding mark is to

be found. It is not an idol we are looking at, like that the prophet saw, whose head was gold, whose breast was brass, whose legs were iron, and whose feet were clay; it is a MAN from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, clear-headed, warm-hearted, sturdy, strong, and true: a man who, with gifts which might have led him to stand apart in a sort of proud disdain from the stern and awful struggles of our time and country, and make himself a tabernacle on his mount of transfiguration, where he could live alone with the seers of the old ages, preferred rather to come down and plunge into the turbid tides which rise and swell about us all, to breast them with us, to guide us and help us, to take his share of the trouble and dismay, and through it all to hear the voice we cannot hear, bidding us be of good courage, and so send the great notes ringing through our hearts, which lift us up to the breakers and tide us over all our fears.

Of the special qualities of WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT's genius, I trust others will speak to-night who are better fitted for the task than I am. My heart is stirred as I stand here to speak only of this simple, sincere manhood of the man who might have found an excuse in that genius for stepping aside from the clear, manful way he has travelled all these years; and I am the more stirred because so many young men are about me in this Club, who may also come, please God, to a great place. It can only be as great as that to which our master has come, standing there where the lights of eternity meet and blend with those of time, as you and I and all of us may be resolute above all other things to make "duty well done" the watchword of life, as he has done. Then, whether ours is the fine gold of genius or only the iron of a sturdy honesty and unconquerable endeavor, we also shall win the blessing of those who know and love us when our day's work draws to a close.

The Chairman of the Committee of Arrangements announced that a communication had been sent to WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT, as requested by the Club, and read the following reply:

ROSLYN, LONG ISLAND, *October 27, 1874.*

*Dear Sir:* Be pleased to express to the "Chicago Literary Club" my thanks for the flattering notice which they take of my eightieth birthday, and their kind invitation to be present at the banquet on the 3d of November. The honor which they have done me is one to which, on looking back upon my past life, I feel that I have no claim, and am, therefore, the more indebted to their generosity. I cannot be present; but my good wishes will be with the members. I hope that they will find the banquet as pleasant, the conversation as entertaining, the speeches, if any, as eloquent, and the viands as well flavored, as if the members had met to celebrate the birthday of some better man. Now I think of it, there must have been born on the 3d of November a great many excellent persons, of both sexes, to whose virtuous lives the world is under great obligations. Will not my friends of the Literary Club pass to the credit of these persons such share of the honors of their festival as I am not worthy of, and thus square the account?

I am, sir, very truly yours,

W. C. BRYANT.

The Rev. ROBERT COLLIER, President of the "Chicago Literary Club."

Mr. ARTHUR BRYANT was then introduced to the Club by the President, who said there was one thing to be regretted as regards Mr. WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT'S career, which was that he did not imitate his brother's example twenty or thirty years ago. He had not come out West, where his great soul would have room to expand; it could not do so to its fullest capacity over in the crowded and confined Eastern country.

Amidst great enthusiasm, Mr. ARTHUR BRYANT rose, and spoke as follows :

*Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Club :* It appears that on the present occasion I am expected, in some sort, to represent WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT — so far, at least, as to give some reminiscences of his life, writings, and character. I believe I have some literary taste ; but I have no literary reputation. My hands have been more familiar with the axe and plough than with the pen ; and I have done more at subduing the wilderness than in catering for literary appetites. It would seem, therefore, that I am scarcely a suitable person to address a literary association. I shall not make a set speech ; but I will talk a little in my fashion, although at the risk of illustrating a remark which I lately heard quoted by yourself, Mr. President — that the beginning of dotage is *anecdote*.

My earliest recollections of my brother are connected with his return home in school vacations — when I used to stare at him with astonishment and admiration, while he, with loud voice and extravagant gesticulation, declaimed, sometimes his own verses, such as the “Indian War Song” and translation of a chorus in *Œdipus Tyrannus*, sometimes those of other poets. I used to commit his verses to memory, and attempt to imitate his oratory. I remember, too, that our grandfather, when his friends came to visit him, was wont to summon my brother to read the manuscript of the *Embargo* ; and I well recollect his hiring him to write an elegy on the death of the *Gerrymander*. I still retain in memory fragments and entire poems written about this period, some of which were never printed. Most of his earliest poems were written in the ten-syllable rhyme of Pope and Dryden ; but after he became acquainted with the writings of Wordsworth, and others of what was called the Lake School, he seldom employed it. In 1810, before he was sixteen years old, he entered the Sophomore class of Williams College, where he remained two years. “*Thanatopsis*” was written soon after leaving college. It was first published in the “*North American Review*,” in a form somewhat different from that in which it appears at present. It commenced with four stanzas in octosyllabic rhyme, and ended somewhat abruptly, twelve or fifteen lines short of its present termination. Of his poems published subsequently, I need not speak. Some have, however, been

printed without his name, and are not contained in any collection of his writings. Such are, the "Chorus of Shades," printed in the "New York Review," and the "Ode to Frances Wright," published in the "Evening Post," when Miss Wright was lecturing in New York. The latter poem caused a considerable sensation at the time. Two New York gentlemen—one of whom was Colonel Stone, editor of the "Commercial"—laid a wager respecting its authorship, one insisting that Halleck wrote it. When they applied to Halleck for information, he told them he did not write it; that there was but one man in New York who could have done it. Another poem—a fragment of which was published in the "United States Review"—would, I think, had it been completed, have become one of his most popular poems. I learned its history, not from himself, for I have ever found him reticent, and singularly averse to conversation about his own productions, but from his wife. The subject was this: In the early times of the Plymouth Colony, a vessel left that port for England, and was never more heard of. He had planned the whole poem, and was enthusiastically engaged in writing it, devoting to it his whole leisure; when verses upon the same subject, by some one, I know not whom, appeared in print. He immediately threw his work aside, and never resumed it. He has, I think, many unpublished poems in his possession; but he will neither speak of nor show them.

Without meddling with matters with which the public has nothing to do, I may say, in regard to his private character, that his temper, though naturally hasty, is highly generous; that he has always repelled with scorn the idea of any action in the slightest degree mean or dishonorable; and that the purity of his moral reputation has never, to my knowledge, been sullied by so much as a breath of suspicion. The retention of his powers of mind and body, for which he is remarkable, is due, first, to the strict temperance which he has practised through life; next, to hereditary transmission. His ancestry, both paternal and maternal, for some generations back, were, with few exceptions, long-lived people, who retained their intellectual, and in a great degree their physical, powers to the close of life. His father was a man of uncommon strength and activity, though he did not live to be old. His grandfather, at the age of eighty-five, would mount a horse with the agility of a young man, and rode out to visit patients only two weeks before

his death. His mother, when she rode on horseback, was accustomed to spring from the ground into the saddle; and her father, when more than sixty years old, ran a foot race with a crack runner, and beat him. From these my brother inherited, if not a very robust, a very enduring constitution. His poetical proclivities may also, in some degree, have been inherited. His father was a man of correct poetical taste, and no contemptible versifier; though his poems were mostly of a political or Hudibrastic character, and upon subjects of temporary interest. His son, in the "Hymn to Death," speaks of him as he

" — who taught my youth  
The art of verse, and in the bud of life  
Offered me to the Muses."

An aunt, too, who died young, possessed considerable poetic talent. Our great-grandfather wrote verses, and there were one or two of the name in England, in times previous to the colonization of this country, who wrote poetry. But WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT is the only one in whom this family weakness ever expanded into genius.

This, Mr. President, is all that I have to say upon this subject. As a matter of course, I am proud of my brother's fame; and I can but feel grateful to the "Chicago Literary Club" for the honor they have done him.

Mr. JOHN H. BRYANT was next called upon, and was very warmly received. He made the following response :

*Mr. President and Gentlemen :* I appear before you to-night an invited guest — invited, as I suppose, because of the relation that exists between myself and the person whose birthday you are met to celebrate. Being thus invited, I had reason to believe that I might be asked to say something here. But what shall I say, what can I say, at all worthy of the occasion that has called you together? Should I speak in praise of this brother of mine, I know that this can be much more appropriately done, and far better, by the eloquent lips of some I see around me than by me. Should I relate incidents of his private history, I might invade the sanctities of the family, and speak of things that delicacy would



forbid. Permit me to say, however, that I have known this brother as long as I have known anyone. In my early childhood, I looked up to him with a feeling of wonder and awe; and from that day my love and veneration for him have never faltered, but have grown deeper and stronger to this very hour. I know, from copies of letters written by my father, who was a man of reading and literary taste, that he early entertained great expectations of the future eminence of his son. When I was yet a child, I well remember that his return home was always an occasion of joy to the whole family, in which I warmly participated, although not old enough to fully appreciate the cause of the delight. It was always a happy time with me in those days, when CULLEN, as we then called him, came home to spend his vacations, for he was lively and playful, tossed me about, and frolicked with me in a way that made me look upon him as my best friend. He seemed to handle me so easily, that I came to have great respect for his prowess and strength, and I used to brag to other boys about my stout brother; but I afterwards learned that his strength was not remarkable, but that he had great skill and celerity in the use of it.

Three or four years since, when walking with him, we came to a blacksmith's shop, beside a brook. "Here," he said, "when I was six years old, I was sent with a horse to get him shod. That was seventy years ago. While waiting for the job, I wandered off up the channel of this brook, and came to a place where the water poured over a rock, making a beautiful cascade — the first thing of the kind I had ever seen on so large a scale. Suppose we go that way, and see if we cannot find it." We did as suggested; went up the ravine, thickly shaded with tall trees, passing several pretty waterfalls, but recognized none as the one he remembered to have seen when a child. We finally gave up the search for that day, and walked homeward. The next morning, my brother said, "John, I have been thinking more about that waterfall, and I now remember all about it. The stream fell over a rock some fifteen or twenty feet, and there was a deep basin of very clear water below it. I remember, also, that there was a round hole in the rock, full of water, and I wondered if it had any bottom, and I got a stick to measure its depth; and I must take another look, for I know I cannot be mistaken about it." ¶ This we did a few days after. Passing up the valley of the brook, as before, we made our way through tangled thickets,

clambered over rocks, and about forty rods beyond where we before went, came to the cascade, with the pool of clear water and the hole in the rock, as he remembered to have seen it seventy years before. I mention this, not so much to state a case of remarkable recollection, as to show that even at the tender age of six years, he had an eye to appreciate the beautiful in nature, and was possessed of a passion to explore the secrets of the unfrequented streams and forests of his native hills. He says of himself:

“ Deep were my musings, in life’s early blossom,  
 ‘Mid the twilight of mountain groves wandering long ;  
 How thrilled my young veins, and how throbb’d my full bosom,  
 When o’er me descended the spirit of song !”

This love of nature that led him in childhood to seek for her hidden beauties by the wild streams and amid the old forests around his early home, still lives, and stirs his heart in old age ; and there is not a stream or forest, mountain gorge or hill-top, for miles around the old homestead in Cummington, that has not felt the pressure of his footstep sometime during the last seven years. Only the last summer, these explorations were pursued with as much zeal, and apparent vigor and delight, as at any previous time.

His recollection of recent events, it seems to me, is quite remarkable for a person of his age. I will state an instance in confirmation. One day last August, as I was walking with him on an unfrequented road, two or three miles from the Homestead, he said, “This is where we found that strange, pretty flower, when we were along here last year.” Walking on a few steps, he exclaimed, “Here it is !” and at the same time stooped to pluck one. My brother has also a wonderful verbal memory. I have heard him say, that until he was seventy-five years old, he could repeat every poem he ever wrote. This uncommon preservation of his mental and physical powers, I think may be attributed to the regularity of his habits in eating, drinking, sleep and exercise. In early life, his health was by no means firm, and for many years his mother often expressed fears that he would fall a victim to consumption. In letters written to the family at this period, he frequently complains of pain in his side, night sweats, and general indisposition. This was, I think, between his twentieth and thirty-fifth year. He still takes his

walks daily, unless the weather is too inclement for any prudent person to be abroad. Within three years, I have known him to walk as far as eighteen miles in a day, much of the distance over rugged, steep hills : and his daughter writes me that within the last week he has walked eleven miles at a stretch, without incurring much fatigue. I went with him, last September, to visit the family of Dr. Dewey, at Sheffield, Mass. After dinner the Doctor took a nap, and my brother proposed, meantime, to show me some of the pretty scenery of the neighborhood, with which he was acquainted. We walked about a mile north, then west about as far, passing a pretty pond of clear water and a picturesque mill, shaded by large cottonwood trees. Then turning south, we walked on a long distance, until I began to fear we might not find a road leading back to the village. And besides, the day was sultry, and the road dusty. I therefore asked my brother if we had not better take a short cut across the fields to the place whence we started, as we could see the church spires in the distance. The reply was, "If you are *tired*, we will do so : if not, I am for going on." Of course, I was not going to own that I was tired, in those circumstances.

My brother, as is generally known, very early in life developed a taste for poetic composition. I have seen verses written by him on the occasion of the total eclipse of the sun, in 1806, when he was in his twelfth year ; and I have at home some lines in his hand-writing, written the same year, on the death of a cousin. I am told that at the age of ten he wrote a paraphrase, in verse, of the first chapter of Job. This was, I think, his first literary venture, his grandfather hiring him to do the work, and paying him ninepence when it was finished. But it was not until his fourteenth year that he began to exhibit much skill, or attract attention as a versifier. I have poems of his, written about that time, which I think would be thought more than creditable, when his age and opportunities are taken into the account. But I shall weary you with these trifles, and will only say further, that in private life I believe my brother has ever been kind, faithful, generous, and just. His public career is known to you all. He is now drawing near the close of a long life, spent, as I believe, in earnest and persevering endeavor to leave the world better than he found it. By the Way and the Gate that lead to the untried scenes beyond, and, as he has told us, "without a dread or a longing to depart ;" and

"In the warm light streaming from the evening sun's broad rim,  
He stands and calmly waits till the hinges turn for him."

Mr. JOHN H. BRYANT then stated that he had in his possession the first twenty-four lines, in manuscript, of a poem of about one hundred and eighty lines, written by WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT, in his fifteenth year, when fitting for college, at Brookfield, Massachusetts, with his uncle, Dr. Thomas Snell. The Mr. A. Bryant to whom the poem was addressed, was an older brother of the writer, now dead. At the earnest request of those present, the lines were passed from one to another, and they are, by permission, printed here :

#### A POEM.

ADDRESSED TO MR. A. BRYANT, BROOKFIELD, MAY, 1809.

Once more the bard, with eager eye, reviews  
The flowery paths of fancy, and the Muse  
Once more essays to trill forgotten strains,  
The loved amusement of his native plains.  
Late you beheld me treading labor's round,  
To guide slow oxen o'er the furrowed ground,  
The sturdy hoe or slender rake to ply,  
'Midst dust and sweat, beneath a summer sky.  
But now I pore o'er Virgil's glowing lines,  
Where, famed in war, the great *Æneas* shines;  
Where novel scenes around me seem to stand,  
Lo! grim *Alecto* whirls the flaming brand.  
Dire jarring tumult, death and battle rage,  
Fierce armies close, and daring chiefs engage;  
Mars thunders furious from his flying car,  
And hoarse-toned clamors fire the raging war.

Nor with less splendor does his master hand  
 Paint the blue skies, the ocean, and the land;  
 Majestic mountains rear their awful head,  
 Fair plains extend, and bloomy vales are spread.  
 The rugged cliff in threatening grandeur towers,  
 And joy sports smiling in Arcadian bowers;  
 In silent calm the expanded ocean sleeps,  
 Or boisterous whirlwinds toss the rising deeps;  
 Triumphant vessels o'er his rolling tide,  
 With painted prows and gaudy streamers, glide.

A cordial invitation to join in the festivities of the evening had been sent to the "Cincinnati Literary Club," in answer to which a letter was read from THORNTON M. HINKLE, Esq., President of that association, acknowledging, in behalf of its members, the invitation to attend the celebration, and expressing their intention to be represented there.

Among the company was one whose graceful tribute to Mr. BRYANT on his seventieth birthday is presented in the record of the festival held on that occasion by the "Century Club," of New York.

The President, alluding to this fact, named as the next speaker, the Rev. HORATIO N. POWERS, D.D., who rose and said:

Any satisfactory portraiture of WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT, whose eightieth birthday we celebrate to-night, would include a consideration of his poetic genius, his services as a teacher of public morals and political philosophy, his scholarship, his relations with art, his place in literature, and his superb manhood. So great a task, though a de-

lightful one, I shall not now undertake; but shall simply draw a few outlines, which your appreciative minds will animate with warmth and color.

As a poet, Mr. BRYANT stands first in American literature. His characteristics are great strength with sweetness, a noble simplicity and rare melody of versification, luminous clearness of expression, tenderness without affectation, a deep religious sympathy with nature, joined to a rare gift of insight and masterly felicity in interpreting its spirit, a profound sensibility to all affecting phases of human experience, exquisite taste, a powerful imagination, and a manly and genuine sincerity. He excels as an artist in portraying features that are most intensely suggestive, and in so preserving the natural relations of things described, that their vitality strikes us where we are most susceptible and receptive. From all literary trickery of every sort he is utterly free. With his fervor and energy, he has a calm and majestic repose. In some of his more serious poems he shows a Miltonic grandeur, yet with no signs of effort. The accusation of poetic frigidity, that was once in fashion against him, was long ago abandoned as unjust. Those who feel deepest, and who see down where flow the undercurrents of life, know full well that there is a divine heat in the poet's soul. But it does not produce bubbles, or fog, or roil, or sputter, or even glittering pyrotechnics. His muse has a solemn and sweet dignity which is never betrayed into rant or declamation. Every line is a jewel. The range of his topics is wide, and though his original poems are not voluminous, yet he has treated just those themes that have the deepest significance to us,—life and death—home and country—liberty and religion—while no poet has ever given more perfect delineations of nature in her varying moods. His ethics are pure and elevating. In his narratives of life, his prophecies of liberty, his pictures of human disenthralment and progress and aspiration, he shows a philosophic insight and comprehensiveness, a devout spirit, and a temper of genuine philanthropy. The inspirations of his poetry are, therefore, of the highest and finest quality.

In all he has written there is no line appealing to a base passion, not a suggestion that is indelicate, not a sentiment that can be used in the support of any evil or injustice. As pure as the snowflake, yet as warm as the tropic wind, is the spirit out of which is born his glorious

song. Those who with clearest vision walk most reverently with nature, and who in the sympathies of a tender and strong humanity aspire most sincerely for virtue and freedom and brotherhood, never cease to find strength and refreshment in his noble strains. They come with an invigorating vitality, moving, consoling, and replenishing life in its soundless depths. We feel in "the great miracle that goes on around us" that infinite love is ever working and benignant. And so the earth and its companionships are more sacred, and our existence becomes a more expressive note in the high harmony of the universe.

As a journalist BRYANT is a model of independence, courtesy, public spirit, patriotism, and fidelity to intelligent and conscientious convictions. His long career at the head of one of the most influential newspapers in the country is unsullied by a single blot. While he illustrates a kind of success that is most attractive to natures of generous aims, he has never sacrificed a political doctrine, nor swerved for a moment from his constancy to principle through the partialities of friendship, or through intimidation, or a low expediency. It is one of the marvels of his great career, that amidst the harassing cares and labors incident to his editorial position, he has kept a sweet temper for scholastic pursuits, and given birth to such exquisite and undying verse.

But the power of his great journalistic influence—a power exerted primarily upon the thinkers and leaders in public life—is due to the wisdom and virtue of his statesmanship; for he is a statesman of the highest type. No man is more thoroughly grounded in political science, no man has a deeper conviction of human rights and duties, or a clearer understanding of the office and obligations of government. And so, with his genius, his intellectual accomplishments, his firmness, courage, independence, and his unconquerable love of justice and liberty, his influence on the mind and councils of the nation has been immense. There is no species of political iniquity that he has not assailed, often with deadly effect; and no doctrines of permanent advantage to the commonwealth that he has not successfully advocated and set firmer in the minds and hearts of men. Not even his strongest political antagonists have ever accused him of office-seeking. While his patriotism has always shone as clear as the noonday sun, he has asked nothing of his country but the privilege to serve her interests in the pursuits to which he has consecrated his life.

BRYANT's scholarship is elegant, profound, and comprehensive. He is familiar with the literature of the learned professions, is a student of science, is accomplished in the chief languages of continental Europe, and is a master of the ancient classics, while he is conversant with the whole field of modern letters. His translation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, made after his seventieth year, is allowed by the most competent critics to be the best, the most truly Homeric, of any in the English tongue. His prose is pure, transparent, graceful, and vigorous. In his *Essays*, *Sketches of Travel*, and *Oration*s, are some of the finest specimens of elegant and noble English that our country has produced.

As a man, BRYANT presents whatever is cultivated, useful and admirable in human character and life. To his splendid genius he joins the noblest virtues. Whatever the temptation, he has never abused his powers and opportunities for unworthy ends. No one can point out in his career an act of injustice, the betrayal of a trust, the advocacy of a doctrine, or support of a candidate, that his own selfish interests might be secured. He has devoted his long and laborious life, which has been carefully preserved by deference to hygienic rules, to the highest culture, and to a beneficent service that has never swerved from its high aim. What is never to be ignored in the estimate of the man is the truth, honor, justice, philanthropy—the high Christian conscience—that he has carried into every field of his endeavor, and which consecrate his renown. He has lived constant to a grand ideal. As Holmes says of him :

“How shall we thank him, that in evil days  
He faltered never—nor for blame, nor praise,  
Nor hire, nor party, shamed his earlier lays?

“But as his boyhood was of manliest hue,  
So to his youth his manly years were true,  
All dyed in royal purple through and through.”

One might say that such a life has been singularly fortunate, but the word does not convey the correct idea of it. It is the result of obedience to Divine law, and is therefore a splendid example of manhood. Filling, as this life does, such a space in the affections of men, so grand in its simplicity, so rich in its fruitage, so manifold



in its utilities, so harmonious in its symmetry, "like perfect music set to noble words," BRYANT may well have, to-day, the reverent homage of a grateful generation. He stands on the summit of his eighty years in a sweet old age, with mind undimmed and physical force wonderfully preserved. Friends are around him. He has competence and fame; the solaces of culture and religion. A nation puts the chaplet of love and reverence and gratitude upon his "good gray head" to-night. Our children rise up and call him blessed. He has all the earth can give of good; but if you should ask him the source of his profoundest satisfaction, he would say that it is in the consciousness of rectitude—in having lived in the love of God and man.

I have wrought a little poem to cast among the tributes of the day, which I will read before taking my seat :

The sweetest blossoms any bring  
 To-day to deck thy muse's throne,  
 Are those that out of pure hearts spring,  
 From seed thy fruitful life has sown.

How deep thy living thought struck down  
 In countless souls throughout the land :  
 The splendid flowers of thy renown  
 In myriad leaves of light expand.

They bloom in virtues strong and true,  
 In deeds that make our kinship sweet,  
 Chaste homes, and lives of spotless hue,  
 In love that serves with tireless feet;

In patriot zeal; in honor's breast;  
 Where duty runs without debate;  
 Where Nature feasts her reverent guest,  
 And Faith waits calmly "at the Gate."

These garlands of the spirit live  
 While festal splendors pass away.  
 Millions their fadeless tribute give  
 To thee, O kingly bard, to-day.

Thanks for thy pure, majestic song,  
 Thy golden years' o'er-measured span,  
 Thy valiant will to smite the wrong,  
 Thy vast unconquered love of man.

Thanks for thy simple faith and truth :  
 Thanks for thy wisdom deep and calm ;  
 The freshness of thy generous youth,  
 Thy life — a sweet triumphant psalm !

Earth's children catch its strains sublime,  
 As ages bear along thy name,  
 And down the glowing fields of time  
 The wise and good reflect thy fame.

Ex-Senator J. R. DOOLITTLE was requested to speak of the political career of Mr. BRYANT, and replied, as follows :

*Mr. President :* Before speaking of Mr. BRYANT's political career, let me express the delight we all have felt, while listening to the tributes paid to him by his brothers, our guests on this occasion. For one, I have been deeply touched by their simple stories of his boyhood, manhood, and still green old age. These stories are warm with a brother's love, and full of a brother's admiration and pride, and yet so modest and delicate that none can accuse them of being eulogistic or boastful.

For myself, sir, I stand in very different relations to Mr. BRYANT ; and while I would exaggerate nothing, I may speak my whole thought without reserve. I stand towards him as a pupil towards a great teacher. As Saul sat at the feet of Gamaliel, so have I, from my youth up, at the feet of WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

For more than forty years he has been, not, as my friend POWERS just said, a statesman, but a teacher of statesmen.

Though called upon to speak of his political character alone, I must be allowed, in passing, to say a word of him as a poet ; for his love of poetry, and his genius for it, have, in some degree, shaped his career as a political teacher and philosopher. They have thrown over his life and over his teachings their sweetness and their charm. Poetry is born

of the ideal, and of the struggle of the human soul to express and to realize it. There is a poetry in philosophy; a poetry in reason; a poetry in religion; and a poetry, also, in the higher walks of politics. From the age of ten years, and still, at fourscore, we see him, whether as poet, student, philosopher, teacher, or journalist, struggling always to realize in all things the ideal of truth, love, and beauty. His whole life is one grand poem.

His poetry is, like himself, always true; true to nature, and true to man. When he strikes the lyre, there is a

“ — music to whose tone  
The pulse of man keeps time.”

His real manhood was itself the base of all his political teachings and philosophy. It is true, to his great genius were added all the gifts and graces which the best schools, his own patient self-culture, and his temperate and laborious habits, could bestow; but to crown all, the still higher and nobler qualities of courage and integrity—a love of truth for the truth’s sake, and the courage to defend it. WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT is honest “upon instinct.” He has in him the stuff martyrs are made of—a love of truth, as the very word of God; a loyalty to truth, so strong that, sooner than be false, he would be led to the dungeon or to the cross. He is one of those highly gifted truth-seeing and truth-loving men, whom no money can buy and no power intimidate; who come into this world, whether born in a palace or in a manger, kings among men, with souls lighted with celestial fire, and natures stamped with the impress of God’s nobility.

This loyalty to truth, with his great capacity to see it, and, in simplest language, to declare it, made him the genius that he is. That, added to his industry, enthusiasm, and endurance, was crowned with an abiding faith, which in darkness feels no doubt, and with a courage which knows no fear—that sublime poetry of faith and courage which, holding fast to the truth, draws upon the Almighty for its strength. These formed the solid base of his manhood. These made him the man that he is, and have shaped and controlled his political course.

He has been a man of convictions. True to them, his allegiance to party was always second to his allegiance to truth. In the low and narrow sense, he was no partisan. In the higher and nobler sense, he

was a leader of parties. He formed and reformed parties. He was not formed or changed by them. He sustained them when right; he opposed them when wrong. He had clear and fixed convictions concerning free trade; the laws of finance and currency; concerning freedom and slavery; the reserved rights of the States; and the rights and powers of the Federal Government as delegated by the Constitution. Guided by these convictions, he acted with parties when they sustained them, and against parties when they opposed them.

Thus, we find him acting with the old Democratic-Republican party until 1847.

At that time, when our armies were in possession of Mexico, and a treaty of peace was to annex to our Republic California and New Mexico, the leaders of that great party determined to extend slavery into all the territory south of  $36^{\circ} 30'$ ; thus departing from the teachings and principles of Jefferson and Madison, who founded the party; who looked upon slavery as a great evil, and, by the ordinance of 1787, prevented its extension into the territories.

At the proposed action of the leaders of the party, Mr. BRYANT was fully aroused.

He was among the foremost and ablest of the leaders of public opinion in the formation of the Free-Soil party of 1848. More to him than to any other man was I indebted for the thought which inspired me, then a very young man, to introduce in the Syracuse Convention that resolution which was rejected by a majority of one vote, and which, by reason of its rejection, became the "corner-stone" upon which the Free-Soil party was based. That resolution, while recognizing the reserved rights of the States, declared uncompromising hostility against the extension of slavery into free territory. None of the leaders of the Free-Soil party did greater service than Mr. BRYANT in uprooting that most insidious doctrine, that "the diffusion of slavery would be the best mode of destroying it"—a doctrine of as much wisdom in politics as that other doctrine would be in farming, that the diffusion of Canada thistles would be the best mode of eradicating them. It was the action of that party which prevented the spread of slavery into the territories acquired from Mexico, and which made California a free State.

After that great triumph for freedom, there was a truce for several years. But in 1854 the battle was renewed. The Missouri Compromise

was repealed; the Territory of Kansas was opened for a struggle fiercer than ever. Then was shed the first brother's blood in this Republic; and, as we look back upon it now, across the sea of blood and agony and tears, we see in Kansas in 1856 the beginning of our late gigantic Civil War.

During all that period, although advanced in years, Mr. BRYANT, I repeat, was foremost among the leaders of public opinion. I do not say he has been always right; that he never erred. But he has always followed his own convictions, and been loyal to the truth. He has been, upon the whole, as nearly right as may be expected of any human being. Amid the turmoil and conflict, and changes of parties and of men, his course has been straightforward and direct, like a clear beam of sunlight athwart a cloudy and ever-changing sky.

Time, and the occasion, forbid my going further into detail; for it is of his political character, rather than of his history, that I am called upon to speak.

He stands before the country to-day, still vigorous at fourscore; a true Democratic Republican still; opposed to centralization, and in favor of home government; opposed to corruption in every form; opposed to paper-money inflation, and carpet-bag robbery. Oh, could that grand old man, as poet, sage, philosopher, and teacher of statesmen, live to see once more a sound currency; an economical government, with decreasing burdens, freed from military pomp and military ideas; the States of the South no longer subjected to military despotism or carpet-bag robbery, he could say, with Simeon of old, "Now let thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen" the salvation of the Republic.

The Rev. Dr. H. W. THOMAS followed, with these remarks:

*Mr. President:* It seems to me most fitting that the "Chicago Literary Club" should thus formally take cognizance of this event, and in this public way honor a name so illustrious, and a life at once so free from faults and so worthy of emulation. There is more than a simple propriety in this, more than the expressions of the gratitude and admiration so grateful to us personally; there is a public

importance attaching to such an occasion. When any one of our race has wrought and achieved so grandly, the world can well afford to pause and say, "Well done!" as he nears the end of his race. In such a recognition, there is an inspiration and an encouragement to all young men, and all public men, to patiently and persistently pursue the upward paths. And in this New World, where so few have as yet attained to any great mental excellence, and where the tendency is so strong to the pursuits that lead to ease, to pleasure, and to fortune, we need to put a premium on thought and scholarship. The world and the church have not been forgetful of their great men in the past; and their saints (some of whom would scarcely pass for saints now) have been canonized, and their statesmen and warriors and scholars have been honored and sung by their own and succeeding ages. And in this we perceive a wise philosophy; for such men combine in their lives, in a remarkable degree, those habits and qualities of mind and heart that society wishes to exalt; and by holding up these to the public gaze, and keeping them ever before the mind, they become watchwords and examples, and rallying cries of piety or of patriotism, or of philanthropy or learning, and standards to which all below are beckoned onward. In this new land of ours, building up out of so many nationalities and peoples and beliefs and customs, we need to keep the presence and memories of great lives ever moving in our midst, and their good deeds before our minds. It might not be a bad thing if we could have some inspired men, even now, to write our "Chronicles" and our "Books of Kings," and make a kind of National Bible, in which their lives and deeds were recorded. There is a desire, on the part of all public men especially, not to be forgotten, and to live on in the loves of after generations. Such records would lead men to shun the short cuts and shallow professions and wicked devices by which a momentary fame is gained, and to build enduring monuments by patient toil, wise policies, and good deeds. I do not know, Mr. President, but it would be a wise thing for this age to stop in its rapid march, and canonize a few saints, and crown a few patriots and philosophers and politicians. Even in Chicago, we might find some saints whose devotion to narrowness and their own opinions would seem to merit preservation, under some appropriate name; and there are others whose breadth and sweetness and devotion might well tarry through coming years. I will not venture to name the philosophers

and statesmen and politicians ; but when the time comes for this Literary Club to move in such matters, I wish to give notice that I shall propose the name of WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

Mr. President, I cannot put away from my mind the presence of a certain feeling of sadness mingling with the pleasant associations of this hour. We put emphasis upon an eightieth anniversary, because it is seldom reached, and we value it because we know there cannot be many more. Whilst we rejoice in the possibilities of a human life, we are brought face to face with its brevity. The want of time is that of which we do all complain. In one of his philosophical romances, Voltaire represents Michromegas, an inhabitant of the Dog Star, as visiting and conversing with the Secretary of Science of our own planet, Saturn. After speaking of the number of senses — one thousand — which the people of his star had, the question of the length of life arose, and the Saturnian complained that they lived only fifteen thousand years. “ Did I not know you to be a philosopher,” replied Michromegas, “ I should be afraid of distressing you by saying, that in our world we live seven hundred times fifteen thousand years, and yet I have always heard them complaining for want of time.” We only count some four-score years on our little star ; but there is a *future*, and to that, as we bend our steps, may we wisely turn our thoughts.

Mr. C. C. BONNEY, a member of the Club, who was unable to be present, contributed the following sentiment :

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT : the chief magistrate of American letters ; in character, one of the noblest examples of enlightened manhood ; as a Publicist, worthy to fill the most exalted official stations ; and as a Poet, unsurpassed in moral purity and grandeur by any other, of whatever age.

A poem, written for the occasion by Mr. F. F. BROWNE,  
was then read :

O poet whom our grandsires loved,  
And whom our sires revered and praised,  
Not less do we—last of the three  
Of generations thou hast graced.

Still in our children's hearts shall chime  
The echoes of thy deathless song;  
And though we sleep, their love will keep  
Still green thy laurels, worn so long.

So hast thou everlasting life :  
Though nations fade, the poet free  
Shall live; and still his utterance thrill  
The generations yet to be.

O Patriarch of the poet throng!  
Not simply have thy singer's arts,  
Nor golden store of scholar's lore,  
Endeared thee to the people's hearts.

To think is much—to BE is more;  
The first is great—the last is good :  
On thee we place the crowning grace—  
Thy universal brotherhood.

Thy love for God is love for man,  
And love for God's works, good and fair;  
And not one jot shall be forgot,  
For Nature knows her worshipper.

The eastern pines thy love shall sing  
Across the land, to where, profound  
By western steep, the wild wave sweeps  
That, save its dashings, hears no sound.



The trees thy loving care didst tend  
 Shall blossom still; and still shall run  
 The laughing rills among the hills  
 And sunny vales of Cummington.

And Roslyn's fields be fair again  
 With bloom, as in those marvellous hours  
 When thou, thy heart from cares apart,  
 Walked lovingly among the flowers.

And Roslyn's woods be all atune  
 With birds that warble forth thy name  
 In Spring-time's green, or Summer's sheen.  
 Or in the Autumn's tints of flame.

Sing out his name—pour out his praise,  
 O woods and streams—O birds and flowers!  
 Repeat, repeat his numbers sweet:  
 His love and fame are yours—and ours.

The closing address of the evening was made by  
 Mr. THOMAS S. CHARD, who said:

In the ages to come it will be the glory of BRYANT, not only that he was the first poet of his country to become eminent, but also that he was the first to reveal the phase of poetic sentiment which is specially and distinctly American.

A deep sense of Nature's beauty, and of the God within and beyond it, inspires his finest verses. He cannot see a forest but he calls it "God's Temple," nor sing of a water-fowl but he must soar with it to heaven. That he has deeply impressed American literature with his devout spirit, cannot be doubted. Our poets see the sacred flame in every bush, and find all nature instinct with the presence of Omnipotence. To his potent influence must therefore be greatly attributed the very remarkable purity of American verse; for it is to be noticed that in all the history of our poetic writings, no poet of distinction has arisen

whose lines have not been in some degree marked by the simple majesty and beauty caught from him whose forehead is this night wreathed with immortal honor. Impure verses are all imported. Thanks to the ascendancy of BRYANT'S influence, they do not grow in American soil. By our river of song, clear as crystal, poets like Swinburne or Byron could not dwell. However great the genius, its metrical garments must be white with purity, or it must stand without the gates. In such a hallowed atmosphere, even the rhyme of the scoffer becomes sweet with devotion and tender with the best expressions of the human heart. What gratitude—measureless—then, our country owes to the great ones who have thus guarded her weal. BRYANT, LONGFELLOW, and WHITTIER are, in the land of song, like the “three Shining Ones” that Bunyan saw in the land of dream. They give to us the sacred scroll of their writings, and seal our foreheads with a love of the pure and true.

To every life must come at last the autumn, early and late. Our poet sang in other hours—

“The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year,  
Of wailing winds, and naked woods, and meadows brown and sere.”

But to him, standing on life's far boundary, no *sad* autumn can come. The spring and summer are indeed vanished, but the “wailing winds” are musical with loving voices, and the “sere meadows” are all shining in the Indian Summer of the Peace of God. Standing in youth and middle age, we love to see this light linger on the horizon's verge, brightening the past and touching the future with golden prophecy; and when it sinks at last we will hardly know it is gone, the sky will be so full of its lingering beams. Long may the light shine on our foreheads and in our hearts. May we reflect its radiance in noble lives, that when our summons comes, we may be

“Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch about him,  
And lies down to pleasant dreams.”

A dispatch sent to the “Century Club” of New York City, and the reply, were read, as follows:

CHICAGO, *November 3, 1874.*

The Chicago Literary Club, at its dinner commemorative of the eightieth birthday of WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT, sends greeting to the Century Club of New York, and joins with it in every sentiment of regard and veneration for the distinguished citizen, scholar and poet whose birthday it is celebrating.

ROBERT COLLYER, *President.*

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NEW YORK, *November 3, 1874.*

The Century Club responds across the continent to the expression of regard and honor to Mr. BRYANT, sent by the Literary Club of Chicago, and on his behalf thanks them for this testimonial of their admiration for the poet and the sage.

G. M. SPEIR, *Vice President.*

A. R. MACDONOUGH, *Secretary.*

The thanks of the Club were returned to the Messrs. BRYANT for their attendance, and the meeting adjourned.













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